

PETERSON'S MAGAZINE.

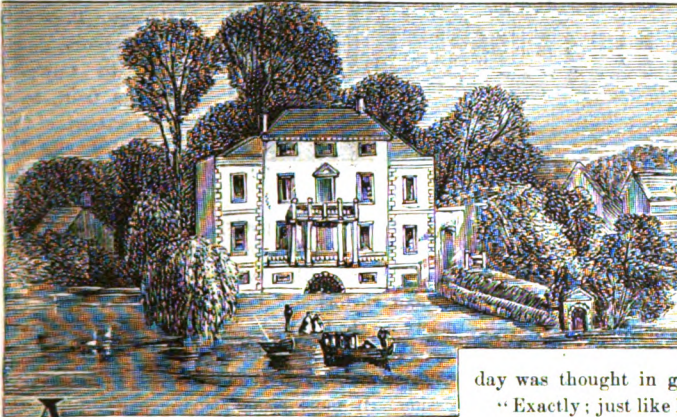
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No. 1.

HOMES OF THE ENGLISH POETS.

BY EMILY J. MACKINTOSH.



POPE'S VILLA AT TWICKENHAM.

A FEW of us had been dining at the hospitable board of a well-known collector of engravings; and after the adjournment to the drawing-room, the conversation turned on English poets.

"I have always been interested in the surroundings of my favorite authors," said our host. "The house a man resides in, it seems to me, gives more or less indication of his tastes, if not of his character. I have here quite a portfolio of engravings of places where the English poets lived. Let me show you some. We will begin with Pope and Addison."

"Why with Pope?" said a famous critic present. "Surely you don't call him—much less Addison—a poet?"

"They were both, in their day, considered to be poets. Addison's celebrated verse about 'riding on the storm' is enough of itself to give him brevet-rank, at least. As for Pope—" He selected a large engraving as he spoke, and went on: "But first take a look at Twickenham, where he lived. It was here that Bolingbroke, Swift, Arbuthnot, and the other wits of the day used to

congregate. The house fronted the Thames, but most of the grounds lay behind, on the other side of the highway; and that he might reach them unseen, Pope had a tunnel dug under the road. He also constructed a grotto, lined with shells and bits of looking-glass; and he got together all the other frippery which in that day was thought in good taste."

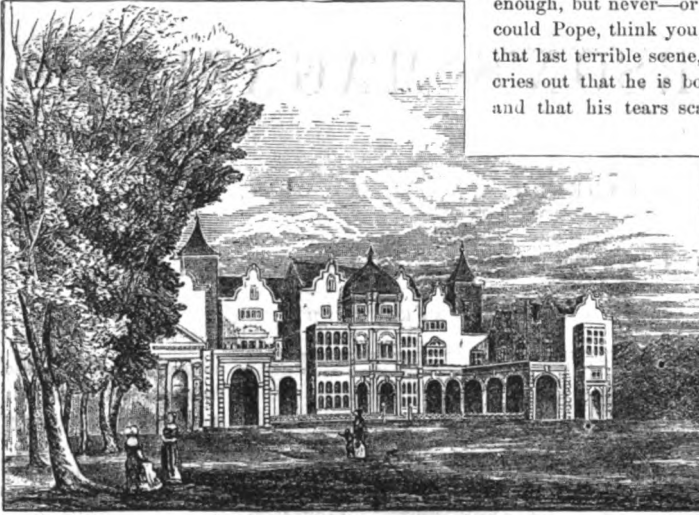
"Exactly; just like him," said the critic. "And his poetry was no more real poetry than his grotto was a real grotto. Both were make-believes."

"Let us, before we go into that question, take a look at Holland House. It was famous, you know, as the residence of Addison, and more famous since as the hospitable home where that modern Mæcenas, the third Lord Holland, held his court. Addison, after he married the widow of the then Earl of Holland, went to reside in this stately mansion. The house was built in the suburbs of London, early in the seventeenth century, and was one of the finest bits of domestic architecture of its day. It was here, in the first forty years of this century, that the Whig wits and poets used to consort—Macaulay, Sydney Smith, Rogers, Byron, Moore: a brilliant galaxy, never since equaled. There is still shown at Holland House the long gallery where Addison used to compose, walking to and fro."

"With a bottle of port at each end," cynically interposed our critic, "from which he took a glass at every turn—as the story goes. But about Pope being a poet?"

"That depends on what you call poetry," said our host, meeting the challenge at last. "Suppose you give us your definition of it."

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HOLLAND HOUSE, WHERE ADDISON LIVED.

"Well, I should say," hesitatingly, "that it was rather difficult to define. However, as an approach to it, let us say poetry is thought, fused with emotion, rhythmically expressed."

"Thought," said our host, reflectively, with his chin in his hand, "as the first element. Yes, that is correct. Then, thought fused with passion, as the second requisite. Well, I concede that. Finally, the thought thus fused must be rhythmically expressed. Yes, that is perhaps as fair a definition as can be given."

"There can be no true poetry without thought as the foundation," said the critic. "One reads, in newspapers and magazines, plenty of pretty verse that jingles nicely enough; but it has no backbone to it—there is no originality of thought: and therefore it is not poetry, in the true sense of the word. Or rather, such verse, though creditable in its way, cannot, critically, claim to be first-class poetry."

"I concede that."

"But even if there is thought—the thought of Milton, for example—there is no poetry unless the thought is fused with emotion. And here is just where Pope was deficient."

"Yet I have known old men, in my youth, who believed him quite the greatest poet in the language. And his influence lasted down to nearly the beginning of this century."

"But you can hardly show a passage in which Pope rose to passion. Everything was correct: there was thought

enough, but never—or rarely—emotion. What could Pope, think you, have done with Lear in that last terrible scene, where the poor old man cries out that he is bound on a wheel of fire, and that his tears scald even it? There you have thought fused with emotion. But Pope would have been incapable of such an imaginative flight: he would have called it fustian."

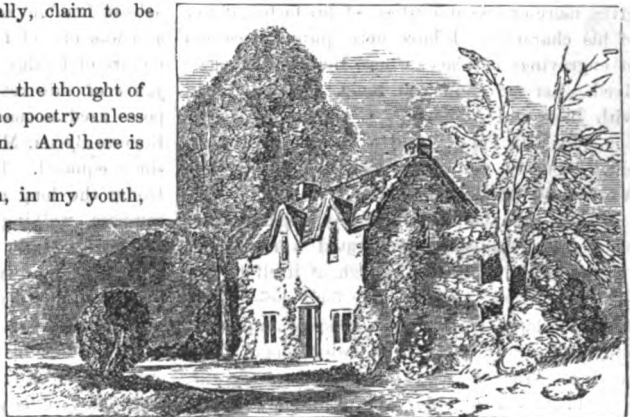
"Perhaps."

"It was the fault of the age. Pope and his successors, down almost to Cowper, were the fruit, to a certain extent, of the exile of Charles II. That monarch made everything French

the fashion. Even poetry, in consequence, became artificial—even analytical. It went about in a bag-wig and with a sword. It became antithetical and rhetorical. Emotion was considered by society as 'bad form'—just as it is in our own day. Yet the highest kind of poetry must always be emotional. The thought must be fused by passion. It must come pouring out red-hot, so to speak, from the furnace of genius."

"I agree to that, as a general proposition. Moreover, the natural expression of thought, when thus fused by emotion, is metaphorical. And here we get at another ingredient of poetry: it must be imaginative."

"Of course," said the critic. "I meant to include that in my term 'thought fused with emotion.' The truth is that imagination—ideality



THOMSON'S COTTAGE AT KEW.

—cannot exist without it. Mere fancy may, but not the higher quality, which we call imagination."

"I fear," said our host, turning to the ladies at this point, "that this discussion tires you."

"Not in the least," said a popular authoress who was present, "we are delighted."

"Then," replied the critic, "I will go on. The third requisite, as I have already said, is that the thought, thus fused with emotion, should be rhythmically expressed. That is to say, it must assume the shape of blank-verse, or else of rhyme. You comprehend?"

"Of course. And yet there is some prose, which, because it has thought, and because the thought is fused with emotion," said our host, "I, at least, would call poetical. For example, De Quincey's 'Opium Eater,' and Burke's famous apostrophe to the Queen of France."

"Poetical? Yes. Poetry? No. The Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, as we have them in our translation," replied the critic, "are intensely emotional and imaginative; and, more than that, are full of thought. In the original Hebrew, most of them

belonged to the highest class. Neither had much of the emotional element, but both had some; and both had thought and rhythm."

"Well, I still claim that Pope was a poet, as also Addison," said our host. "Perhaps neither



ROOM WHERE GOLDSMITH, JOHNSON AND OTHERS MET.

belonged to the highest class. Neither had much of the emotional element, but both had some; and both had thought and rhythm."

"Yes," said the critic; "if you put it in that way, I agree. Certainly, Pope has never been equaled for terseness. His mastery of language is wonderful. Yet, after all," with a growl, "he only set philosophy and good morals, so to speak, to a hand-organ; and all the world ever since has been grinding at it, and quoting his 'Essay on Man.' But that is not poetry."

"Well, let us give up Pope," said our host, with a smile. "Here is a picture of the cottage which Thomson occupied in Kew lane. The 'Seasons' were once almost as popular as the 'Rape of the Lock.' Thomson came after Pope. He wrote in a somewhat different vein, but he was, after all, a good deal under his influence."

"The 'Seasons' were sincere," growled the critic. "They went directly to nature. Thomson wrote as if he had really seen fields and woods and running water. He



OWPER'S HOUSE AT WESTON.

were in rhythm; and in that language they were poetry. Even in the translations, especially the Psalms in the Prayer-Book translation—for that translation is a more poetical one than that in the Bible—they almost touch poetry: so rhythm

was, in poetry, what Gainsborough, in painting, was a few years later. Pope wrote as if he had only read of them, and as if they were rather beneath the notice of a gentleman—as if they might do for rustics, but were quite unworthy



COTTAGE AT AYR, WHERE BURNS WAS BORN.

one who knew Lady Betty, took snuff, and lounged daily in a coffee-house."

"What do you say of Goldsmith? Pope died in 1744, and Thomson in 1749; but Goldsmith did not die till 1774, or thirty years after Pope—a whole generation. In fact, as a poet, Goldsmith was half a century later than Pope: for Pope was born in 1688, or nearly fifty years before Goldsmith. Now the latter was the connecting-link between the school of Pope and the school of Byron. Here is the famous room, in the well-known London tavern, where he and Johnson and others; 'the club,' used to meet."

"Yes," said the critic; "and in that half-century a vast change had come over England. The nation was becoming more earnest. A great religious revival had taken place; the American colonies had revolted; the French Revolution was in the air. In the higher circles, indeed, men still frittered away their time.

If you doubt that, read 'George Selwyn,' and the other memories and letters of the period. But the people were becoming a power, and were soon to make that power felt. It is from the people, too, that great poetry usually comes. An aristocracy may patronize poets, but it rarely creates them. The Saxon Cædman, Piers the Ploughman, Shakespeare, Burns—all were from the people. With the exception of Byron, all the great English poets have risen from the people—including in that

term, of course, what is called in England the middle-class."

"I have here a print of Cowper's house at Weston," said our host. "Cowper, according to your idea, I suppose, marks the definite beginning of the new era—the era that culminated in Byron and his school, as distinguished from the earlier school, the school of Pope."

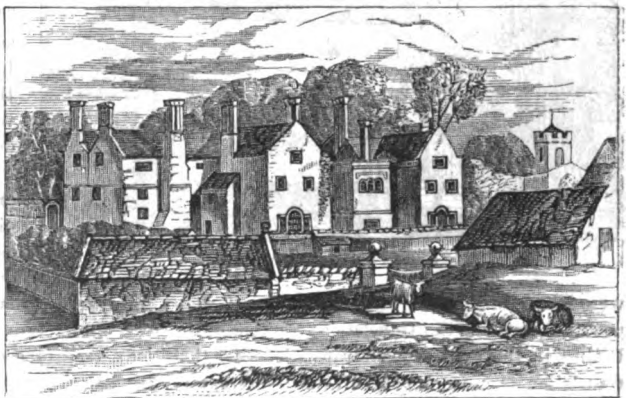
"The house certainly is a type of the man," said the critic. "It is plain and severe, even to Puritanism."

"With him begins realism. Thomson, Goldsmith, even Gray, are more or less artificial; but he is not so at all."

"Ah, you mention Gray," answered the critic. "His 'Elegy' seems to me the water-shed, so to speak, of the poetry of the eighteenth century: on one side the school of Pope, on the other side the new school—the school that has lasted down to our own day."

"Yes," said our host; "but Cowper was the real reformer. He brought back poetry to the simplicity and naturalness that had characterized it before Charles II."

"But the true founder of the modern school was Burns," interposed the critic. "Cowper only showed the way. It was Burns that really led the revolution. He was born, I think, in 1759, and died in 1796. So much of the false glitter of the French school still lingered, however, among the upper circles, that it was not till after his



ANNESLEY HALL, WHERE MARY CHAWORTH, BYRON'S FIRST LOVE, LIVED.

death that he was appreciated. Poor fellow, what a life was his!"

"Both he and Cowper did little else but suffer," said our host, with a sigh. "Cowper had moderate means, indeed, and therefore did not suffer from poverty; but he was morbid, and in ill-health, and always in dread of insanity. Burns almost literally died of starvation. See, here is the poor cottage in which he was born; and the house where he died, at Dumfries, was but little better."

"Yet, as a song-writer, the greatest in the language."

"And, up to his time, with no superior as a poet generally, if we except Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton."

"Perhaps not," replied the critic, dubiously. "But what place is that?" For our host had taken up another print.

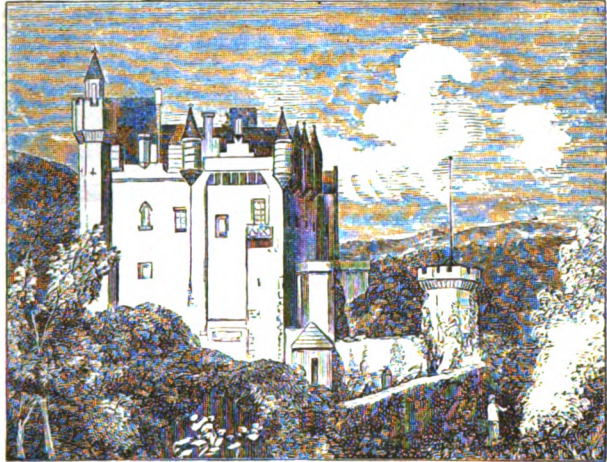
"That is Annesley Hall, where Byron's first love lived—she who threw him over for a handsome fox-hunter. You all know the 'Dream,' in which he tells the story. I show you this engraving because Newstead Abbey is so familiar, while Annesley Hall is comparatively little known."

"Poor Byron, as well as poor Burns," I said.

"Yes," returned our host; "they both died

triumphed, it triumphed chiefly through their genius. The age influenced them, but they influenced the age also. The fire in their souls was so intense that it soon burned out the poor shell. Burns died at thirty-seven, Byron at thirty-five, with not quite a generation between them, Byron, in one sense, being the successor of Burns, and carrying onward the torch which the latter had lighted."

"Essentially of the same school," said the

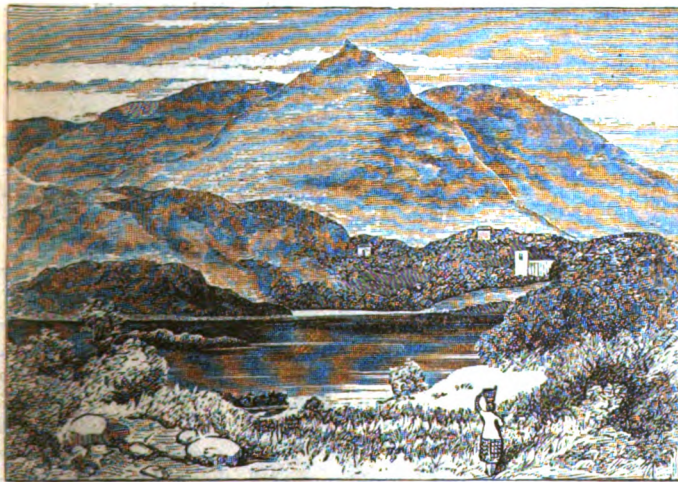


ABBOTSFORD, THE HOME OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

critic, "though, at first sight, apparently so different. But oh! there is Abbotsford."

"I take this up now," said our host, "because I think Scott comes in best here—after the passionate, emotional school, and before that of Wordsworth. Scott belonged to the former, but he infused into his poetry a certain romanticism, which places him apart from anybody else. You see it in this castle, which he built, and which is a type of his character. His soul was in the past: he was a survival of the feudal ages."

"Yet I doubt if he would ever have written



GRASMERE, WHERE COLERIDGE LIVED.

young, and both were unhappy. In them the emotional element culminated. They were the very antipodes of Pope. When their school

'Marmion,' if it had not been for the French Revolution," said the critic. "It was the military spirit of the time which was his moving-



RYDAL MOUNT, HOME OF WORDSWORTH.

poet—hardly even Shakespeare—has surpassed. Yet the quantity was not much to speak of," with a light laugh. "But the quality was superb. Coleridge was the laziest man that ever lived. Perhaps he really had no staying power. Perhaps he was only a quarter-horse, as they say in Kentucky. Ah! there you show us Rydal Mount, where Wordsworth lived so long. What say you of him? Was he a poet?"

spring: the middle ages were only the armor, so to speak, in which he fought. Nevertheless, there was something more in his romanticism than appears at first thought. He brought back high ideals. He lifted men above the materialism—the prosaic spirit—of the eighteenth century."

"This is Grasmere, in Westmoreland," said our host, taking up another engraving: "the lake country, where Coleridge and Wordsworth lived, and which they first brought into notice. Coleridge was, perhaps, the greatest genius of them all. But his infirmities of mind and body prevented his doing anything on a large scale. His best poems—'Christabel' and the 'Ancient Mariner'—are but fragments."

"Yet what fragments!" It was the critic who spoke, and he spoke with enthusiasm—a rare thing for him. "There are bits of Coleridge that no

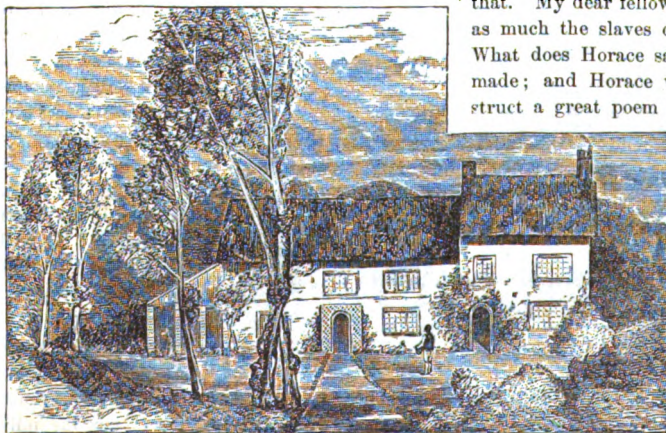
"Certainly," said our host, as he passed the print around. "In Burns and Byron, the emotional element was in excess: in Wordsworth, by a natural reaction, it was at a minimum. Yet Wordsworth could be emotional—often was; and, in spite of the 'Excursion,' was a poet. Remember his lines on 'Lucy.' But his poetry, as a whole, was often merely a philosopher talking in verse."

"Sometimes it was worse; mere trash, in fact. For what else was 'Peter Bell,' and others?"

"But if 'Glimpses of Immortality' isn't poetry, and of the highest class," retorted our host, "what is?"

"Go on, go on," replied the critic, "or we shall never get through. I see that the ladies, in spite of what one of them said to the contrary, are tired of our critical jargon, our 'fused by emotion,' and 'rhythmically expressed,' and all that. My dear fellow, we are, after all, perhaps as much the slaves of a theory as Wordsworth. What does Horace say? Poetry grows—it isn't made; and Horace was right. You can't construct a great poem by foot and rule."

"Well, then, we'll say no more about theories," replied our host, laughing. "Only remember, it was you yourself who undertook, 'ex cathedra,' to give a definition of poetry. Of Campbell's homes I have no engraving; the truth is, he can not be said, poor fellow, to have had a home. But some of his poetry—the



MOORE'S COTTAGE AT SLOPERTON.

'Battle of the Baltic,' 'Hohenlinden,' etc.—was very fine. 'Gertrude of Wyoming,' however, is only second-rate—about on a level with 'Lalla Rookh.' And that brings me to Moore. Here is the cottage where he lived, at Sloperton, near Lord Lansdowne's seat at Bowood. We all know Moore's songs. They are no longer as popular as formerly: but no one can deny their melody, nor the wit of his lighter pieces."

"Part of that popularity," remarked the authoress, "comes from the fact that Moore was a musician himself. No one can write a song so well as one who can himself sing. Burns always tried his own songs before he sent them to the publisher; and Burns and Moore, as song-writers, are unequaled."

"Though their poetry was as different as day and night," growled the critic.

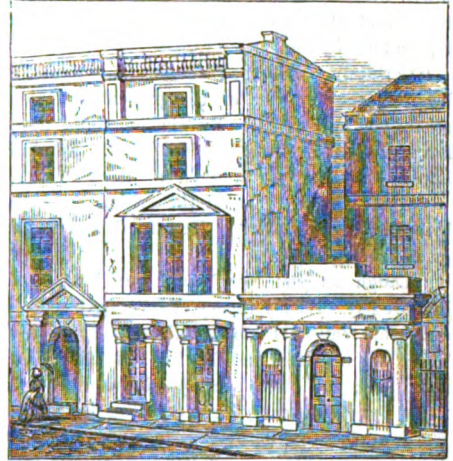
"Not quite," interposed our host, coming to her rescue. "Of course, the difference was very considerable," with a smile.

"Sometimes almost as great as between tinsel and diamonds," snapped the critic.

"Well," said the authoress, "after all, it does not do for a song-writer to be too far in advance of his audience. What is true of oratory seems to me to be true of a song. I have read somewhere that he is the most effective orator who, intellectually, stands only a step or two above his

Daniel come to judgment!' You have hit the very reason why the 'Last Rose of Summer' is so popular."

"While we are looking at places where poets dwelt, we must not forget the town-house of



HOUSE OF ROGERS, IN LONDON.

Rogers, the banker, but author of 'Italy' and other poems. He lived to a great age, as you all know, dying in 1855, when ninety-two years old. Moore lived to only seventy-two, dying in 1852.

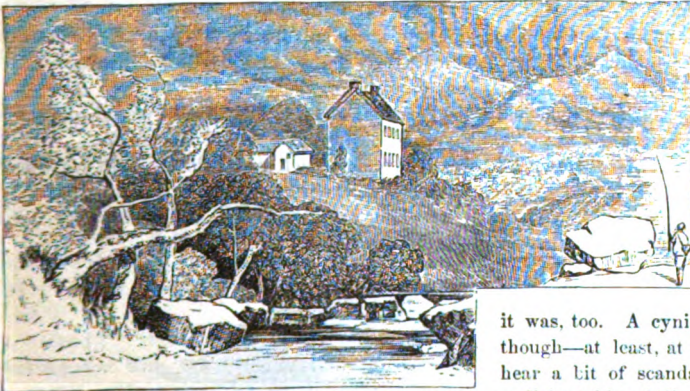
Rogers was more famous for his wealth than for his verses, however."

"But he entertained magnificently," returned the critic. "I remember breakfasting in that very house," pointing to the print, "more than thirty years ago, and meeting Macaulay, Thackeray, and others, there: and a breakfast 'for the gods' it was, too. A cynical old rascal Rogers was, though—at least, at that time: always ready to hear a bit of scandal, or to whisper something malicious himself."

"We used to read Mrs. Hemans when we were younger," said our host. "Here is the cottage at Rhyllon, in Wales, where she lived so long. Forty years ago her poetry was thought to be inimitable."

"Her 'Landing of the Filgrims' is still read in schools," said a publisher who was present, "and is found in all books of 'Elegant Extracts.' And so of others of her productions."

"Tender, and sweet, and graceful. But, in presence of those who come next, a mere echo of



COTTAGE OF MRS. HEMANS, IN WALES.

hearers; who thinks, therefore, their thoughts, and shares their sympathies and emotions; yet who, being able to express their thoughts more tersely, and to give vent to their passions with more imaginative force, carries his listeners away with him, because he is only saying what their poor, inarticulate souls wanted to say, but couldn't."

"Very good, my Portia," said the critic, looking at her approvingly over his spectacles. "'A

an echo. Mrs. Norton, and especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning, greatly excelled her. But now for Keats and Shelley."

"Are they also founders of schools?" said the critic, sarcastically. "Is the triumph of Wordsworth over Byron to be followed by a triumph of Keats and Shelley over Wordsworth and Brownning and Tennyson?"

"Certainly," answered our host. "Keats, at least, is the founder of the present school, if school you may call it. Swinburne would never have written, if Keats had not lived. Nor perhaps," hesitatingly, "would Tennyson."

"Great Jupiter!" cried the critic. "Who is bringing theories now?" He turned, and smiled on us triumphantly.

"Laugh as you may," said our host, good-humoredly, "yet my theory of successive schools, and what caused them, is substantially correct. There was no 'hard and fast line' dividing them, it is true; one often overlapped the other: for while Byron was carrying everything before him, Wordsworth was gathering together his own disciples; and meantime Keats and Shelley were writing; and Keats, at least, founding, as I have said, the school of to-day."

"Alas! a prophet before his time," said the critic. "So little did he forecast the future, that he said, while dying, as we all know, that his 'name was writ on water.' It is astonishing how little he was appreciated when alive, however: it makes us wonder at the taste of his age. But of course Byron was carrying everything before him, and that is the explanation."

"Yet there is nothing in the English language," said our host, "finer, in its way, than the 'Ode to a Grecian Urn.' Or where is there more color than in 'St. Agnes' Eve,' and in almost everything indeed that Keats wrote?"

"Rather too sensuous sometimes," said our

critic, crossly. "One gets cloyed with its sweetness. I do, at least."

"You can't bring that accusation against Shelley," replied our host. "His poetry is translucent in its spirituality—a perfectly colorless diamond."

"Yet," I ventured to say, "a diamond, in one sense, has color: it gives back a thousand prismatic hues; and so did Shelley."

"You are right again," said the critic, nodding approvingly. "Shelley's lyrics are the best we have. His 'Skylark' is simply perfect. I think it was Macaulay who said that the 'Cenci' was the greatest drama since Shakespeare. Shelley was often imperfect in his art, and was frequently careless; but there was nothing of the 'earth, earthy' about him: he walked apart, high up in Olympus—walked with the gods."

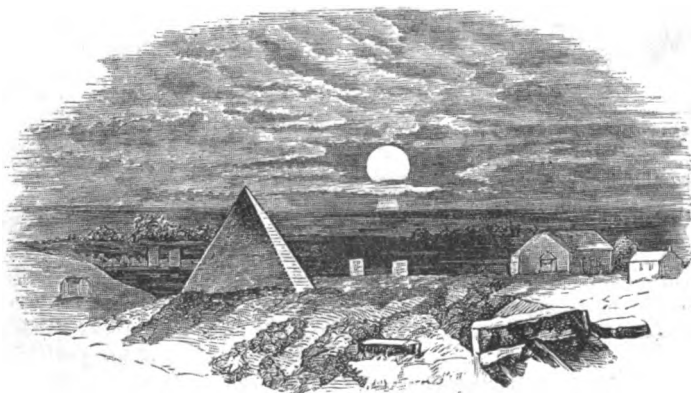
"Here," said our host, "is the graveyard at Rome, under the shadow of the pyramid of Caius Cestus, where his ashes lie, and where Keats also is buried. The solemn grandeur which the artist has thrown around his sketch is in keeping with the sad end of both."

"To think what they might have done," said the critic, sadly, "if they had survived to the ordinary age of mortals; for Keats died in 1820, when only twenty-four years old; and Shelley, was drowned, in 1822, in his thirtieth year. What possibilities went down, and forever, into darkness and chaos, with them."

"Yes; for their later works were their best," said our host. "Thus we have every reason to believe, that, if they had lived, they would have gone on excelling."

"Perhaps, if they had lived, we should not have had Tennyson," added the critic. "They would have done such grand things, that he would never have had the courage to write at all."

At which we all laughed, and the party, soon after, broke up.



GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS, AT ROME.